

The Pigna Paper Mill and the exercise books of the «new Italy» (1870-1960) *

Anna Ascenzi

1. A company at the service of the school: the Paolo Pigna Paper Mill in Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

It is quite likely that in unified Italy, no other business apart from the Paolo Pigna Paper Mill in Alzano Lombardo (Bergamo), has been able to link its own image so strongly to the sector of the market where it operated, that is the Italian school – almost to the point of stabilising a sort of “total identification” with it.

In the same way, one could say that – much earlier than the coming of modern systems of advertising and communication – the Pigna exercise books, with their wide range of typologies and their richly illustrated covers, took root in the social imagery of many generations of students, and they became in fact, something more than a simple aid for the educational activity, more than a minor element of the school equipment: they actually ended up with representing an almost fixed, ever present object – despite their variety of formats and typologies – both in the image and the, though sometimes faded, memories of one's own school life, and in the collective portrayal of the daily life of Italian students.

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Fig. 1. *Selection of rags*, ca. 2nd half of 19th century (Pigna Paper Mill Historical Archive).

After all, if one retraces the origins and the significant steps of this company's history, we can well understand how this identification with the school reality is neither an accident, nor the result of a series of fortuitous circumstances, but the outcome of a policy which had been tenaciously planned by the company ever since its beginning¹.

As known, in 1856 the entrepreneur Paolo Pigna (1802-1888) took over a pre-existing paper mill in Alzano Maggiore, near Bergamo, and after having restored its buildings, began the production of hand-made paper, which was exclusively made of rags². About fifteen years later, in 1870, the company – which had been formally set up with the business name of *Cartiere Paolo Pigna*, with its registered office in Milano³ – made a first step towards mechanization, by introducing into the production cycle continuous machine which was able to produce up to 6-7 quintals per day of different kinds of paper, especially fine quality paper⁴. In 1872 the same entrepreneur in front of the *Committee of inquiry into industry* showed in detail the specific features of the company's production compared with the other paper mills in the province:

¹ See *Cartiere e fabbriche di pasta di legno nella Provincia di Bergamo*, «Bollettino dell'Associazione dei fabbricatori di carta e arti affini del Regno d'Italia», IV, ottobre 1893, 5, pp. 9-40.

² A. Mandelli, *Alzano nei secoli. Storia della antica comunità alesana*, 2nd edition revised and augmented, Bergamo, Bons, 1988, p. 323.

³ See *Registro Generale delle Notificazioni dei Commercianti e Negozianti Arti e Commercio della R. Città e Provincia di Bergamo*, in Archivio di Stato di Bergamo, vol. II; *Registro Ditte*, in Archivio della Camera di Commercio, Industria, Artigianato e Agricoltura di Bergamo. See also: L. Fiorentini, *Monografia della Provincia di Bergamo*, Bergamo, 1889, pp. 101-103.

⁴ In 1870 at the Exposition in Bergamo the company obtained the silver medal for «the fine and good quality of the machine-made paper, as coloured or not» (A. Mandelli, *Alzano nei secoli. Storia della antica comunità alesana*, cit., p. 323).



Fig. 2. *The mechanisation of the paper making, early 20th century* (Pigna Paper Mill Historical Archive).

There are other paper mills, but they only produce ordinary paper, while I make fine papers, paper for registers, for ordinary letters and very thin paper, paper telegraph rolls, paper made from coloured pulp and coloured coated paper, and marbled paper⁵.

Three years later, in 1875, whilst carrying on his forced march towards mechanization, the entrepreneur made a continuous paper-making machine – which was able to produce up to 25 quintals per day – and which was to be installed in the plant of Alzano Maggiore⁶. The investment and technological innovations of this period soon achieved results: in the mid-1870s the paper mill employed about forty workers and boasted a highly differentiated production, with a special attention to the production of high-quality paper. Almost the entire production was sold on the Milan market, where the company had its own storeroom⁷.

The small business founded by Paolo Pigna found itself in the beginning to be in a particularly complex economic and political scenario, which at a local level was characterized by several small workshops. Their presence on the market was already difficult because of their small dimension and poor mechanization, but it was further limited by strong foreign competition and the sub-

⁵ «Ve ne sono altre, ma fabbricano solamente carta ordinaria, mentre io fabbrico anche carte fini, da registri, da lettere usuali e sottilissime, rotolini per telegrafo, colorate in pasta e colorate con patine, marmorizzate» (*Deposizione di Paolo Pigna*, in *Atti del Comitato dell'inchiesta industriale* (1870-1874). *Deposizioni orali*, Firenze, 1874, vol. IV, t. I).

⁶ See *Annuario delle cartiere italiane 1875. Compilato da A. Gola. Anno I*, Milano, Tip. Giuliani e C., 1875, p. 11. See also G. Cima, *L'industria della carta*, in N. Zucchelli (ed.), *Ingegneria e industria in terra bergamasca*, Bergamo, Sindacato Provinciale Fascista Ingegneri di Bergamo, 1941, pp. 133-134.

⁷ A. Mandelli, *Alzano nei secoli. Storia della antica comunità alesana*, cit., p. 332-335.

stantial lack of an industrial policy which was able to offer the new national paper industry a serious prospective of development. In 1873 the *Committee of inquiry into industry* gave this judgement regarding the situation and the future prospective of the sector:

Papermaking is widespread enough in Italy, especially due to the goodness and amount of rags which are gathered across the peninsula, and to the propitious hydrographical features of many Italian provinces. In the past years production was exclusively hand-made, but progressively mechanical techniques have been introduced, which produce in a quicker, and cheaper, way⁸.

In reality, statistics from the late 1870s give the image of a production field which was still strongly fragmented into a multitude of small artisan workshops (very few had average dimensions) and which were especially concentrated – because of the need for hydraulic energy – along the rivers at the entrance of the alpine and pre-alpine valleys. Statistics indicate the existence of 521 firms, for a total of 17,312 workers, an engine force of 13,980 hp – almost entirely hydraulic – and a wealth of equipment which included 813 vats, 73 cylinder machines and 95 continuous paper making machines, for a yearly production which is estimated to have been about 600 thousand quintals⁹.

After being rendered a limited partnership in 1883, from the 1880s the Pigna paper mills expanded their dimensions, and therefore «in a few years got to a first vertical integration»¹⁰. Together with the modernization of technical equipment, i.e. through the acquisition of machines for the production of finished paper, in nearby Alzano di Sopra a laboratory was established for the production of wood-pulp, with three *fiberizers* and a 20 hp hydraulic engine. This laboratory represented a turning point in the traditional production strategies of the company: the almost exclusive use of rags as a raw material began to be – though only partially – substituted by pulp, a material, however, which was destined to prevail in the following years. At the end of the nineteenth century the paper mill of Alzano Maggiore employed about 150 workers and had machinery which was powered by a hydraulic force of 70 hp.

⁸ «È piuttosto estesa in Italia la fabbricazione della carta e lo si deve in gran parte alla bontà e quantità degli stracci che si raccolgono nella penisola e alle condizioni idrografiche assai propizie di molte province italiane. La fabbricazione si esercitava esclusivamente, negli anni andati, con metodi a mano, ma in progresso vennero adoperati sistemi meccanici, i quali producono molto più prontamente e con maggiore risparmio» (*Atti del Comitato dell'inchiesta industriale, 1870-1874. Riassunti delle deposizioni orali e scritte*, Firenze, 1874, p. 1).

⁹ V. Ellena, *La statistica di alcune industrie italiane*, Roma, 1879, pp. 117-126; Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, *Notizie statistiche sopra alcune industrie*, Roma, 1878.

¹⁰ «giungendo in pochi anni a costruire un abbozzo di integrazione verticale» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, in V. Zamagni, S. Zaninelli (eds.), *Storia economica e sociale di Bergamo fra Ottocento e Novecento. II. Il decollo industriale*, Bergamo, Fondazione per la storia economica e sociale di Bergamo, 1997, pp. 319-346).

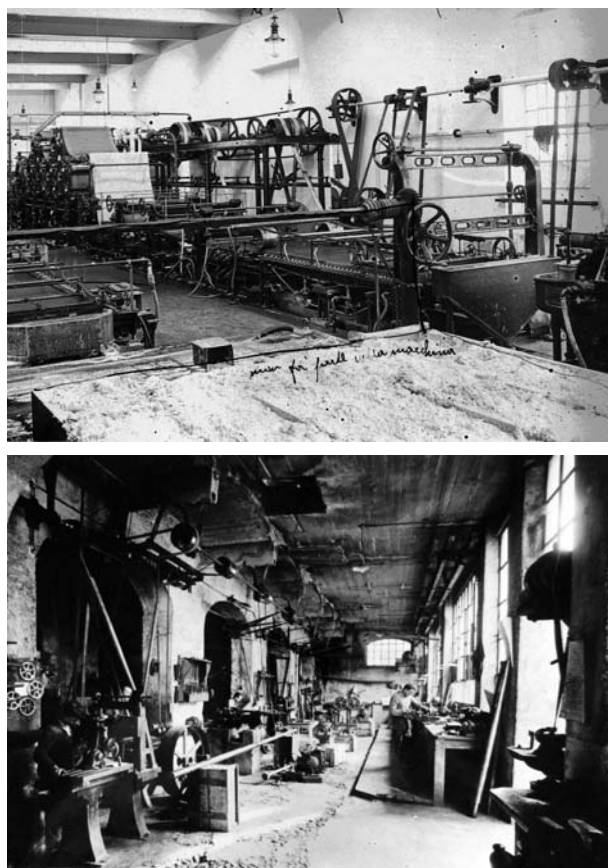


Figs. 3a-b. *Interiors of the establishment and storehouse, late 19th century* (Pigna Paper Mill Historical Archive).

This factory produces – as read in the *Industrial Statistics* for the year 1900 with regard to the factories in Lombardy – stationery paper, writing paper, paper for registers, drawing paper, many sorts of cardboard, gift items in luxury boxes, visiting cards, invitation cards, condolence cards, glossy and non-glossy, imitation wood paper, marbled paper, imitation shagreen paper and so on¹¹.

The starting-up of the Pigna paper mill in the new century occurred in a national and local framework of the paper industry, which was characterised by ups and downs. It is true that, with respect to the mid-1870s, production at the beginning of the twentieth century had increased almost twice as much: from 600 thousand to a little under 1,200,000 quintals of paper. It is also true that for the same period the *Industry Statistic* noted for the year 1903 that for the 405 active factories, occupational levels were modest with about 19,088 workers employed in the sector. Vice versa, the progress registered with regard to the level of mechanization in the companies was noticeable, with an engine force which had practically doubled – even though still hydraulic in great part

¹¹ «Da questa fabbrica escono carte da cancelleria, carte da lettera, da registro, da disegno, da stampa, cartoni d'ogni genere, articoli novità in scatole di lusso, biglietti da visita, per partecipazioni, per lutto, carte lucidate e non lucidate, con imitazioni di legno, di marmo, zigrinata uso pelle ecc.» (Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, *Statistica industriale. Lombardia*, Roma, 1900, pp. 55-56; N. Zucchelli (ed.), *Ingegneria e industria in terra bergamasca*, Bergamo, 1941, p. 133).



Figs. 4a-b. *The paper machines' room and the forge*, late 19-early 20th centuries (Pigna Paper Mill Historical Archive)

– and with a slight increase in technical equipment both with respect to the use of cylinder machines and in continuous paper-making machines¹². It should be added that:

a partial diversification had occurred in the prime materials used: even though the percentage of rags used remained high i.e. vegetable and mixed fibres, straw, canvas and esparto – the importance of mechanical wood-pulp, two thirds of which was nationally produced, and of cellulose, which was almost totally imported¹³, were becoming increasingly important.

In the Bergamo area, the development of the paper industry in the second half of the nineteenth century was fairly limited. The firms – with the exception of the Pigna mills – essentially maintained their artisan features and dimen-

¹² Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio – Direzione della Statistica, *Statistica industriale. Industria della carta*, «Annali di Statistica», serie IV, 1898, 91; Id., *Statistica industriale. Riassunto delle notizie sulle condizioni industriali del Regno*, parte I, Roma, 1906, pp. 202-209.

¹³ «una parziale diversificazione si era prodotta nelle materie prime utilizzate: se ancora alta risultava la percentuale di stracci vegetali e misti, paglia, steli di canapa e sparto, acquistava sempre maggiore importanza la pasta di legno meccanica, per due terzi di produzione nazionale, e la cellulosa, quasi totalmente importata dall'estero» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica, 1861-1951*, cit., pp. 320-321).

sions, even though a slight technical development can be noted. In the early years of the 1900s there were 8 paper mills, compared with the 9 registered in 1861; there were 247 workers with respect to the 318 noted forty years before; the total engine force amounted to 456 hp, of which 380 were hydraulic – in comparison with the 198 hp registered for the year 1861. From the point of view of technical equipment, the statistics for the late nineteenth century, noted 6 continuous and cylinder machines and 8 *fiberizers*, which confirms the increasing use of wood-fibre as a prime material, along with the use of traditional rags. At a local level, along with the Pigna paper mills, a noticeable role was played by the company of the Pesenti brothers in Nembro, and of Clivati & C. in Alzano Maggiore¹⁴.

After the death of Paolo Pigna (1888), the company was directed for a short-time by his son Carillo. Control was then taken by Giuseppina Pigna and her husband Daniele Pesenti (1861-1911)¹⁵, who assumed direction¹⁶. The Pesenti family, one of the most prestigious families of local entrepreneurship¹⁷, had for decades belonged to «generations of “master paper-makers”, but although their paper mill in Nembro was still working, despite its ups and downs, from the end of the 1870s they had devoted themselves to the production of hydraulic lime and cement, a sector which at that time was booming in the Bergamo area. But they did not neglect other initiatives and enterprises, and one of these was in fact the Pigna paper mill»¹⁸.

When Daniele Pesenti assumed the direction of the company, it was in a critical situation:

The Pigna paper mill – we can read in the *Family's Memories*, which were written in 1931 by Cesare Pesenti – [...] was in dire straits. [It was] Messy, with respect to the old equipment; irrational, with respect to the arrangement of the buildings; the hydraulic power was wrongly used; the transmissions, badly arranged; transport, badly organized; full of wrong manoeuvres, which made the work difficult and uneconomical, the paper mill was indebted, not very productive and lacking in modern technical devices, which were insufficient for the needs»¹⁹.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 322-323. See also *Industria della carta ed arti grafiche*, Milano, Hoepli, 1883

¹⁵ See *Atto costitutivo del 23 febbraio 1895*, in Archivio della Camera di Commercio di Bergamo, Serie della Cancelleria commerciale del Tribunale di Bergamo, vol. 321, società n. 590.

¹⁶ See *Nota di trascrizione della Ditta Paolo Pigna di Alzano Maggiore al R. Tribunale Civile e Penale di Bergamo del 23 settembre 1897*, *ibid.*

¹⁷ A. Mandelli, *Alzano nei secoli. Storia della antica comunità alesana*, cit., p. 54.

¹⁸ «una generazione di “maestri cartieri” ormai da decenni, ma nonostante la cartiera da loro posseduta a Nembro funzionasse ancora, sia pure tra alterne vicende, a partire dalla fine degli anni Settanta dell'Ottocento si erano dedicati con crescenti fortune alla produzione della calce idraulica e del cemento, settore all'epoca in fortissima espansione nel bergamasco. Non per questo i Pesenti trascurarono altre iniziative e attività, e una di queste fu proprio la Cartiera Pigna» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., p. 333).

¹⁹ «La cartiera Pigna [...] era in assai grame condizioni. In disordine nel troppo vecchio macchinario; irrazionale nella disposizione dei fabbricati; male sfruttata la forza idraulica; mal disposte

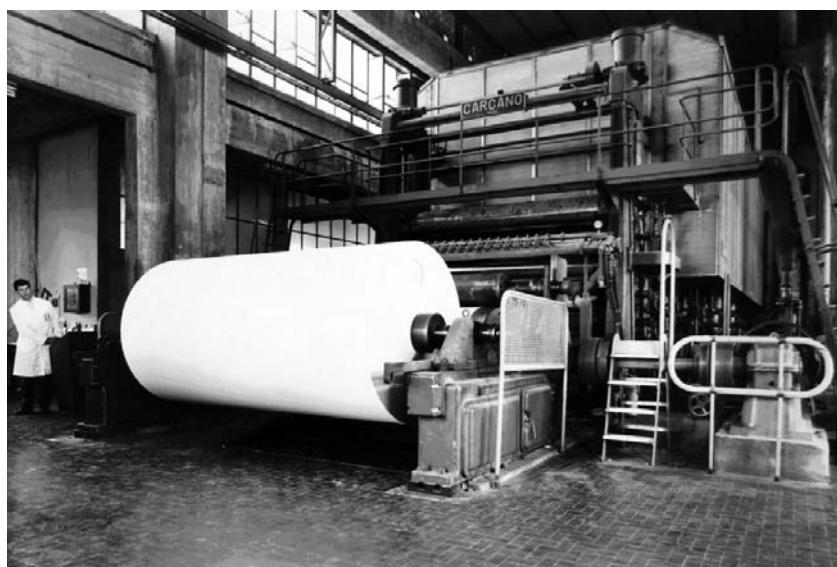


Fig. 5. Paper machine, 1st half of 20th century (Pigna Paper Mill Historical Archives)

In a few months Daniele Pesenti was able to re-organise the company on new premises, and later, to enlarge them through the building of new and functional departments, which made them much more efficient and profit making. His restructuring was global and implied a «total technical reorganization, through the rationalization of the flows of production, and new investment with respect to the equipment; finally, the financial situation was resolved»²⁰. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the Pigna paper mill was once more competitive on the market²¹.

It was also merit of the intuition of the Bergamo entrepreneur who immediately realised – already in the late nineteenth century – that it was necessary to increasingly specialise the company, and to steer production towards the key-field of school-notebooks and of the material which supported paper writing, which exactly at that moment was beginning to develop across the peninsula. Between the beginning of the twentieth century and the Second World War in fact, the «Italian paper industry went through a strong development. The entire paper and cardboard production rose, from 1,150,000 quintals, to more than 5,310,000 in 1939, and the number of workers employed in the

le trasmissioni; mal regolativi i trasporti; piena di false manovre che rendevano difficile e antieconomico il lavoro, la cartiera aveva debiti, produceva troppo poco e non disponeva di mezzi tecnici moderni sufficienti al bisogno» (C. Pesenti, *Memorie di famiglia. Lotte, travagli e fortune*, Bergamo, Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1931, p. 51).

²⁰ «una completa riorganizzazione tecnica, con la razionalizzazione dei flussi produttivi e nuovi investimenti in macchinario; infine, venne risanata la situazione finanziaria» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., p. 334).

²¹ C. Pesenti, *Memorie di famiglia. Lotte, travagli e fortune*, cit., pp. 55-61.

sector from 23,257 in 1911 to 56,127, and marked concentrations occurred in the sector»²². At the basis of such a development, the very increase in domestic demand must be considered with relation to the ever falling rate of illiteracy and the continuous increase in schooling; as well as the growth in the publishing industry and the increasing spread of periodicals and newspapers²³.

In continuity with the firm's traditional production of ordinary paper together with fine paper, papers for registers and writing paper, various coloured and elaborated paper²⁴, Pesenti chose to aim production especially at writing materials, above all, notebooks and writing materials for schools and education. It is no accident that the advertisements for the company, which at that time were published by a specialised press, and spread through commercial channels, showed this kind of material for the very first time. Therefore, in addition to the «writing paper, in envelopes and boxes, paper for registers, in double or triple-glossed paper, paper for printing, paper made from coloured pulp, wrapping paper, various cardboard, envelopes and paper bags, registers and letter books of various format, size and ruling», in the company catalogue, one can clearly read «paper and stationary for offices, paper for schools, notebooks»²⁵.

Production for schools had by then its own stable market and, therefore, it needed exact rules, which aimed not only at guaranteeing the quality and marketability of the products, but also at protecting the role of the enterprises involved in the sector; we can see this from the significant battles which were carried out in the early years of the twentieth century by Daniele Pesenti and other Milanese paper manufacturers through their *Association of paper producers and related arts*, which had arisen in 1888 and counted the Pigna paper

²² «l'industria cartaria in Italia registrò una fase di forte espansione. La produzione totale di carta e cartoni passò da 1.150.000 quintali a più di 5.310.000 nel 1939, gli addetti salirono da 23.257 nel 1911 a 56.127 e nel settore si verificarono accentuati fenomeni di concentrazione» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., pp. 328-329).

²³ P. Lanino, *La nuova Italia industriale. Volume terzo. Industrie chimiche, alimentari ed agricole*, Roma, 1917, pp. 3-30; V. Porri, *l'evoluzione economica italiana nell'ultimo cinquantennio*, Roma, 1926, pp. 182-188; Ministero per la Costituente, *Rapporto della Commissione economica presentato all'assemblea costituente, II. Industria, I. Relazione*, Roma, 1947, I, pp. 137-148.

²⁴ See F. Barbieri, R. Ravanelli (eds.), *Storia dell'industria bergamasca*, Bergamo, Grafica & Arte, 2003 (reprint), p. 178.

²⁵ «carte da lettera, in buste e scatole, carte da registro, in doppia e tripla colla, carte da stampa, carte colorate in pasta, carte da impacco, cartoni vari, buste e sacchetti, registri e copialelettere di ogni formato, dimensione e rigatura [...] carte da ufficio e da cancelleria, carte da scuola, quaderni» (see for example: *Le cartiere italiane all'Esposizione di Torino*, «L'industria della carta. Giornale pratico per la fabbricazione e applicazione della carta, cartoni, succedanei e articoli affini, per le industrie grafiche in genere, cartonaggi, carte da giuoco, ecc.», I, 1898-1899, n. 2-3, p. 20; *Annuario della Città e Provincia di Bergamo*, Bergamo, Tip. Gatti, 1899, p. 265; *Le fabbriche di carta in Lombardia*, «L'Industria della Carta e delle arti grafiche», VII, 1° ottobre 1904, 19, p. 220).

mill among its founding members²⁶. In spring 1905, for example, Daniele Pesenti presented at a meeting of the *Association* two matters of topical interest for the approval of the members:

The meeting – as we can read in the minutes of the 14th May 1905 – therefore examines two items on the agenda, which have been presented by the Paolo Pigna enterprise: the former one, in order to lodge a petition to the Ministry of Public Education, to promulgate rules regarding the notebooks' ruling according to precise models; the latter, so that the producers may eliminate, from the cover of exercise books, the printing of the buyers: after a short discussion in which the engineer Ostrogowich, the gentleman Pesenti, Mr. Sesana, the commendatore Siccardi, the engineer Nodali and Dr. Molina participated, both items were approved²⁷.

The first point wished to resolve a far from banal problem, which had been faced by the producers of exercise book many times in the previous years: that is the lack of exact rules set out by the Ministry of Public Education regarding the size and features of the exercise books to be used in the various classes of the primary and popular schools. The lack of such guidelines in fact, had led in the past to stationers and sellers refusing entire lots of merchandise. The second point was, under many aspects, even more important: the firms (which until then had produced on behalf of a third party, and had been forced to put the stationers' or retailers' mark on their products) decided to assume the production of their own exercise books, with the specific intention of linking their own name with this kind of product.

The position assumed by the *Association of paper producers*, thanks to the leadership of the Pigna company, marked a turning point in the field of production and sale of school exercise books, since in actual fact it facilitated the official entry onto the school-market of new and inured companies: which, like the Pigna paper mill, in the following years aimed increasingly at establishing new and more useful agreements with retailers (stationers, shops etc.), in order to set up an ever increasing network for the distribution of materials across the national market²⁸.

²⁶ See *Atti dell'Associazione dei fabbricatori di carta ed arti affini del Regno d'Italia. Adunanza dell'11 marzo 1888*, in «Bollettino dell'Associazione dei fabbricatori di carta e arti affini del Regno d'Italia», I, agosto 1888, 1, pp. 13-14.

²⁷ «L'assemblea prende quindi in esame due ordini del giorno presentati dalla Ditta Paolo Pigna: l'uno perché venga fatta istanza al Ministero della P.I. per l'emanazione di norme che regolino la rigatura dei quaderni con modelli ben definiti; l'altro perché i fabbricanti aboliscano dalle copertine dei quaderni la stampa della ditta committente: dopo breve discussione, cui partecipano l'ing. Ostrogowich, il cav. Pesenti, il sig. Sesana, il comm. Siccardi, l'ing. Nodali e il dott. Molina, i due ordini del giorno sono approvati» (*Associazione dei fabbricatori di carta ed arti affini. Assemblea dei Soci 14 maggio 1905*, «L'Industria della Carta e delle arti grafiche», VIII, 16 maggio 1905, 10, p. 1).

²⁸ In this connection, see the references made by Juri Meda in his paper: «*Contro il tanto deprecatato mercantilismo scolastico*»... *I controversi rapporti tra editori, insegnanti e cartolai e l'intervento del regime*, which has been presented in the aforementioned International Symposium *School Exercise Books* in Macerata.

After the tragic death of Daniele in 1911, the leadership of the company was taken over by his son Carillo Pesenti Pigna, who had to confront the difficult situation created by the First World War and the economic and production crisis which soon followed in the post-war period²⁹. Under Carillo Pesenti the enterprise reached its definitive affirmation on the national market, as can be argued from the birth of a proper commercial sector and the creation of a stable network for distribution which linked stores all across the peninsula. In 1919 a first restructuring of the society occurred, with the Pigna paper mill becoming a joint-stock company³⁰ with a corporate capital of 4 million lira, which increased to 8 million lira in 1920, with two consecutive moments of growth³¹. In the following year the productive structures were enlarged, through the acquisition of the Ghisalberti paper mill (ex Clivati) in Alzano Maggiore³².

Despite the difficult context of the economic crisis due to the revaluation of the Lira and the crisis in the market and in production which exploded in 1929³³, as well as, in the following period, restrictions caused by the autarchic

²⁹ *Le industrie e la guerra. Validità cooperazione delle Cartiere alla produzione di proiettili*, «L'Industria della Carta e delle arti grafiche», XIX, 1° settembre 1916, 9, pp. 166-172. But see also V. Porri, *l'evoluzione economica italiana nell'ultimo cinquantennio*, cit., pp. 185-187.

³⁰ See *Copia autentica del verbale 8 settembre 1919 del Consiglio di Amministrazione della Società Cartiere Paolo Pigna alla Cancelleria del Regio Tribunale Civile e Penale di Bergamo del 3 ottobre 1919*, in Archivio della Camera di Commercio di Bergamo, Serie della Cancelleria commerciale del Tribunale di Bergamo, vol. 321, società n. 590.

³¹ In connection to this, see *Copia autentica dell'atto di trasformazione di società e aumento di capitale sociale*, 1° luglio 1919, rogata dal notaio Francesco Finardi, n. 11425, del 29 luglio 1919, Archivio della Camera di Commercio di Bergamo, Serie della Cancelleria commerciale del Tribunale di Bergamo, vol. 321, società n. 590. After transforming the Pigna paper mill into a joint stock company in Alzano Maggiore, 25th June 1919, the Board was composed of: the engineer *commendatore* Giacomo Tedeschi (president), the honorable attorney Paolo Bonomi (vice-president), the gentleman Angelo Manzoni, the gentleman Luigi Gervasoni (advisors), the gentleman Mario Franzi (managing director and general director of the new society); one year later, in October 1920, an extraordinary assembly of the stockholders, in addition to increasing the capital up to 8 million, added two new board counsellors: the *commendatore* Cesare Pesenti and the *commendatore* Carillo Pesenti. See *Bilanci, dividendi, aumenti di capitale, costituzioni e scioglimenti di società*, «L'Industria della Carta e delle arti grafiche», XXII, 1° agosto 1919, 8, p. 109; *Bilanci, dividendi, aumenti di capitale, costituzioni e scioglimenti di società*, *ibid.*, XXII, 1° settembre 1919, 9, p. 123; *Bilanci, dividendi, aumenti di capitale, costituzioni e scioglimenti di società*, *ibid.*, XXII, 1° ottobre 1919, 10, p. 137; *Bilanci, dividendi, aumenti di capitale, costituzioni e scioglimenti di società*, XXIII, 31 ottobre 1920, 10, p. 167.

³² See G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., p. 333.

³³ «The revaluation of the lira, the 1929 crisis and the autarchy created many problems for the company. Especially severe were the effects of the market restriction, the collapse of prices, and the foreign markets – which nevertheless accounted for about 10-15% of the total turnover – together with, from 1935, the imposition of a quota on the raw material, especially cellulose. The company had to noticeably decrease its working rhythms and hours, and to dismiss workers. In order to restrain the falling prices, in 1932 the same Pesenti Pigna promoted a national consortium for the producers of exercise books: this consortium assigned a quota to the associated firms which was proportional to their related production potentialities, leaving freedom with regard to

policy³⁴, constant elements of the Bergamo enterprise in the 1920s and 1930s can be seen. These were, on the one hand, the specialisation of production and on the other, the continuous updating of technology.

In 1926 – as has been highlighted – Carillo Pesenti established a new department of materials pertaining to the paper-transformation industry, and the enterprise began increasingly to specialise in producing school materials, especially exercise books³⁵: in 1931 – with about 850 workers – the production capability touched 5,000 quintals of paper per month, against the 700 at the beginning of the century, and some years later the production of exercise books was mechanised³⁶.

Furthermore, the commercial organization was improved through the opening, in 1929, of new stores in Milan and Trieste³⁷. With regard to production, a significant improvement occurred when «the firm succeeded in accessing the state job orders, becoming the sole supplier of ribbon paper both for the Telegraph and the Railway administration»³⁸.

On the eve of the Second World War, with a production which was especially centred on paper for office and stationery, and particularly on exercise books, the Pigna paper mill reached noticeable occupational levels, employing about 850 workers. The daily productive potential of about 250 quintals of papers made it one of the most important enterprises in this field at a national level³⁹. In spite of the losses and difficulties which followed the world conflict, in the post Second World War period the business, always firmly in the hands of the Pesenti and Pigna family heirs,

the sales conditions. After two difficult years, the Consortium was dissolved. From 1935 the sector, and the company, had to suffer the effects of the autarchy, or more precisely, a strong increase in the prices of raw materials, together with the difficulty in importing the more modern machines, especially with regards to the machines for the paper making industry» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., pp. 334-335).

³⁴ See C. Pesenti, *Memorie di famiglia. Lotte, travagli e fortune*, cit., pp. 51-61. But see also the yearbooks: *L'Industria nella Provincia di Bergamo*, Bergamo, G. Gaffuri, 1927-1932; Consiglio provinciale dell'Economia [after: Consiglio provinciale dell'Economia corporativa] di Bergamo, *Relazione statistica*, Bergamo, 1927-1935.

³⁵ *Annuario delle cartiere italiane e delle industrie operatrici della carta e del cartone, commercianti in carta, industrie grafiche ed editoriali. Informazioni statistiche*, Milano, Edizioni de «L'industria della carta e delle arti grafiche», 1933-1934, p. 152.

³⁶ «Nel 1926 Carillo Pesenti impiantò un nuovo reparto di articoli cartotecnici e l'azienda si dedicò sempre più alla produzione di articoli scolastici, in particolare quaderni: nel 1931 – con circa 850 addetti – la potenzialità produttiva sfiorava i 5.000 quintali di carta al mese contro i 700 d'inizio secolo, e qualche anno dopo la produzione di quaderni venne automatizzata» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., pp. 333-334).

³⁷ See *L'industria cartaria nella provincia di Bergamo e le Cartiere Paolo Pigna*, «La Rivista di Bergamo», X, 1931, II, pp. 78-80.

³⁸ G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., p. 334.

³⁹ *Società italiane per azioni. Notizie statistiche 1940*, Roma, Associazione fra le Società italiane per azioni, 1940, p. 1403.

stressed even further its production specialisation, so that in 1960, against a global paper and cardboard production of 167,000 quintals (which rendered it the nineteenth business in the national field), 163,000 quintals were constituted by paper for writing (the eighth position in the field)⁴⁰.

2. The production of exercise books by the Pigna paper mill between political plans and market demands

The Pigna exercise books accompanied the literacy and mass-schooling process of Italians, especially when – from the second half of the 1870s onwards – the school measures, which were promulgated by the Historical Left (the Coppino Law), rendered the process more intense and systematic⁴¹. The Alzano Lombardo business, which developed between the two centuries, especially at a local and regional level (Bergamo, Milano and the Lombardy area), from the eve of the First World War could count on a network of commercial delivery, which covered great part of the national territory.

The archival documentation witnesses how the Pigna paper mill – long before any other company in the sector – understood the importance of connecting the production for schools with the national project for the education of Italians, which was carried out by the Liberal ruling class, despite varying phases and according to different modalities and forms, from the era of Crispi⁴². The Alzano Lombardo company strove to adapt its products to the mass-schooling and nationalization of Italians, increasingly going along with the process which aimed at embedding in the people the feeling of the crucial role played by the school, in order to improve the social-cultural development of the Nation, and to establish a specific communitarian identity. It was a process which, launched with increasing conviction during the era of Giolitti,

⁴⁰ «accentuò ulteriormente la sua specializzazione produttiva, tanto che nel 1960, di fronte a una produzione complessiva di carta e cartoni di poco superiore ai 167.000 quintali (che la collocavano al diciannovesimo posto nel settore nazionale) ben 163.000 erano rappresentati da carta da scrivere (all'ottavo posto nel settore)» (G. Subbrero, *L'industria cartaria e poligrafica (1861-1951)*, cit., p. 336).

⁴¹ See M. Bendiscioli, *La Sinistra storica e la scuola*, «Studium», 1977, n. 4, pp. 447-466; and G. Talamo, *Istruzione obbligatoria ed estensione del suffragio*, in *Stato e società dal 1876 al 1882. Atti del XLIX Congresso di Storia del Risorgimento Italiano*, Roma, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1980, pp. 57-100.

⁴² See S. Soldani, *Il Risorgimento a scuola: incertezze dello Stato e lenta formazione di un pubblico di lettori*, in E. Dirani (ed.), *Alfredo Oriani e la cultura del suo tempo*, Ravenna, Longo Editore, 1985; G. Chiosso, *Nazionalità ed educazione degli Italiani nel secondo Ottocento*, «Pedagogia e Vita», 1987, 4, pp. 421-440; U. Levra, *Fare gli italiani. Memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento*, Torino, Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1992; S. Soldati, G. Turi (eds.), *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea. I. La nascita dello Stato nazionale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993.

was to undergo significant and unexpected developments in the years of the Great War and those following it and which would reach its acme during the Fascist period.

An in-depth analysis of the features of the exercise books which were produced in Alzano Lombardo, and especially of the pioneering importance which was promptly attributed to the pictures and to the introductory texts of these same pictures for the covers, seems to be fundamental from this point of view, in order to appreciate the development and the characteristics of the production and commercial strategy of the Pigna paper mill; but also in order to assess the leading role which the firm played in building a specific school culture, and in the development of the mass-educational process between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The production of the Pigna exercise books appears to be marked in fact – especially from the last decade of the nineteenth century – by a clear and conscious ideological-political project which accompanied and overlapped its production and commercial projects to the point of becoming the driving force of this latter one: its principal and most direct tool of development and entrepreneurial success, an expression of a kind of “surplus value”, which qualified the same product, rendering it more recognisable and attractive – and therefore more commercially competitive – on the market.

The production of school-notebooks was destined to a great development in Italy during the eras of Crispi and Giolitti, when literacy and schooling were, by then, a large and established process: the precocious specialization of Pigna in this sector, together with the choice – much more so than other companies in those years⁴³ – of markedly characterising its own products through a systematic valorisation of their features, and the functionality and efficacy of the message conveyed by the exercise books (such as by means of illustrations and printed texts), reveals a precise and modern marketing strategies. These strategies, on the one hand adopted the general direction and the concern of the ministerial and more generally political “national pedagogy”, which was repeatedly expressed by the diverse ruling classes of the country – from Crispi to Giolitti to Mussolini, passing through the difficult period of the Great War and the early post-war period⁴⁴; on the other hand, they also tried to adjust the general indications of such a “national pedagogy” to the

⁴³ For a first census of the enterprises which worked in this field, see: J. Meda, *Quaderni di scuola. Nuove fonti per la storia dell'editoria scolastica minore*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 2006, 13, pp. 73-98.

⁴⁴ In this connection see: A. Ascenzi, *Tra educazione etico-civile e costruzione dell'identità nazionale. L'insegnamento della storia nelle scuole italiane dell'Ottocento*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2004; M. Ostenc, *L'éducation en Italie pendant le fascisme*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1980; e J. Charnitzky, *Fascismo e scuola. La politica scolastica del regime (1922-1943)*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1994.

characteristics and communication potentials of the *medium*, that is the school exercise books⁴⁵.

In fact, the exercise books, without losing their original material function, i.e. keeping their modest nature of secondary and subordinate tools within the students' didactical equipment, ended up by playing a "new" and diverse role, in comparison with their original one. One could say rather, that this different and parallel function of the transmission of educational content and messages – and later, of ideological and political propaganda, especially during the Fascist period⁴⁶ – manifested itself even beforehand, in an autonomous manner, with respect to the actual material usage, in the classroom or elsewhere, of the exercise book. In some particular cases, such as for the exercises books which were destined to receive explanations and texts concerning the history of the country or, in the Fascist period, destined to spread the principles and directives of the Mussolini regime, one can find a peculiar complementarity between the "editorial message" of the schoolbook (i.e. the illustrations and the printed text of the cover) and the "school writings" produced by the student, according to a perspective where the first one (the editorial message) aimed at becoming a further "reinforcement" and confirming/legitimising the second one (the "students' writings").

At the base of the production and commercial strategies of Pigna, a series of reasons and general beliefs can be traced. First of all the vivid awareness that the exercise book, where it had been immediately capable of transmitting a reassuring iconic-verbal message which was easy to understand at all levels, could play a crucial role – even though only an auxiliary and complimentary role – in the scholastic and extra-scholastic formation of the new generations, and indirectly of the same Italian families, especially from the working classes and rural areas. Secondly, was the firm conviction that, much more than the schoolbook, the exercise book was destined to circulate in household spaces – that is amongst the students' family members – and was destined to stimulate the interest and the attention of the adults, who would not have disdained the illustrations and related explanatory texts, which characterized the "editorial message" of the exercise book. Conveniently adjusted to the demands and capabilities of a mass public, which was only in part made up of young students, the exercise books' illustrations and texts could have contributed – in this sense – to complete and enlarge the patrimony of knowledge of the readers, who – as the producers soon realised – were not limited only to the actual owner of the exercise books.

⁴⁵ See A. Viñao Frago, *Los cuadernos escolares como fuente histórica: aspectos metodológicos e historiográficos*, «Annali di storia dell'educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche», 2006, 13, pp. 17-35.

⁴⁶ See also the excellent work of L. Marrella, *I quaderni del Duce. Tra immagine e parola*, Taranto, Barbieri, 1995.

Last, but surely not least, it must be pointed out how the Pigna paper mill soon matured the belief that the cover illustrations, i.e. the iconic message which the exercise books transmitted, needed special care and attention. The images had to be adapted to a widespread childish public (in the original meaning of the phrase «childish people», coined by Silvio Antoniano, or the more recent and contemporaneous «pupil people», *popolo pupillo* in Italian, as formulated by the real expert of national-popular education that was Francesco Crispi⁴⁷). In other words they should be attractive and captivating, even absorbing; they should reflect, over the years, the development of the childish and popular *social imagery*, and the changes in tastes and customs so that they would be always up-to-date and abreast of the times. From here, the choice of the Alzano Lombardo company to concentrate, in an ever more noticeable and systematic manner, and with real moments of excellence during the Fascist period, on skilled and/or already famous illustrators, who at times boasted a specific production of plates destined to illustrating manuals and school books, periodicals and books for children and youth; or who, on a different level, had already coped with the growing and complex world of designing advertising posters⁴⁸.

It is worth mentioning here the presence in the first two decades of the nineteenth century of known artists such as Carlo Tallone and Gino Boccasile, who also worked with Pigna during the 1930s. Richer is the number of illustrators, already famous and/or beginners, during the twenty year Fascist period: Sergio Bonelli, Giovanni Bonfanti, Galileo Chini (*Chin*), G. Divala, Marcello Dudovich, Libero Maraja (*Lima*), Carmelo Marotta, Nino Pagatto, Mario Puppo, Guglielmo Sansoni (*Tato*), Roberto Sgrilli, Bruno Stefani, Boris Zueff. Finally, amongst the illustrators who worked for Pigna during the post Second World War period, we must recall E. Gusmaroli, Lico, G. Mattoni, Manno Previtali, Giorgio Scudellari and Guido Zamperoni (*Zam&Roni*). A similar attention was naturally devoted to the choice of the authors of the texts which accompanied and supported the illustrations on the covers, but with regards to these characters the research into the Pigna Company's historical archives has not yet given back precise information and data.

The success enjoyed by the Pigna Company – already in the late 1920s it had control of a large part of the flourishing market of the school exercise books, in part thanks to the state job orders – was also due to the contribution of other factors which we should remember, albeit only briefly. First of all, the

⁴⁷ See U. Levra, *Fare gli italiani. Memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento*, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁸ About Italian illustrators for children, see A. Faeti, *Guardare le figure. Gli illustratori italiani dei libri per l'infanzia*, Torino, Einaudi, 2001; and P. Vagliani, *I grandi per i piccoli: autori e illustratori per l'infanzia a Torino dal 1900 al 1950, tra letteratura, pittura e arti decorative*, in *Bibliofilia subalpina*, Torino, Centro Studi Piemontesi, 2000, pp. 121-136. A first census of illustrators of Italian notebooks of the twentieth century is contained in J. Meda, *Quaderni di scuola. Nuove fonti per la storia dell'editoria scolastica minore*, cit., p. 90.

nature of the exercise book's iconic-verbal message, was able – much more so than a schoolbook, a dictation, classroom readings or the actual lessons held by teachers – to pour into the daily life of the pupils (and their families) and, like a sort of modern advertising message, for a determined period (the period of use of the didactical aid) reiterate its content, rendering it familiar and creating a background, almost a *continuum* in the perceptual universe of the individual pupil's experience.

Secondly, the equally revealing aspect was the fact that, no matter what its specific didactical use (for composition and/or exercises, for rough or final copy, etc.), the exercise book established a daily relationship of familiarity with the pupil and, also thanks to the essentiality and repetitiveness of the message transmitted, it aimed at facilitating the acquisition/fixing of specific contents and images – much more so and better than textbooks which, because of their complexity, needed the mediation of teacher. Because of the impersonal features of textbooks and the fact that they were common to many students, as well as their nature as finished products, defined in their formal and content features, textbooks made less likely the possibility of the process of a pupil's identification/appropriation – compared to exercise books – especially if we consider that it is a process which notably weighs on building a determined imagery.

It must be added that, inside the Alzano Lombardo company, the conviction was soon clear that it was necessary to introduce systems and solutions in order to make pupils faithful to the Pigna products: that is, to obtain a sort of “loyalty” from the client. As in the case of collecting the Liebig picture cards – which were matched with specific popular goods – it was a question of building a relationship of continuity with the buyers. Hence, the launch of an actual “series” (a sort of monothematic collection) of exercises books, which were destined to build many thematic routes to be completed through acquiring a certain number of items, and whose iconic-verbal message was autonomous in each single exercise book and, at the same time, embedded into a more global itinerary of information/education, which developed and ended up in the “series”. After being launched in a fairly anonymous manner and already limited form in the years of the war with Libya, this strategy of creating loyalty in the pupils reached its acme and maturity during the twenty year Fascist period, when – as shown by the same company's advertising – it triggered off a mechanism of purchase similar to that of the collecting of picture cards, with the aim of completing the entire collection of exercise books of one or more “series”, as well as the search for possible missing copies.

A review, albeit brief, of the main subjects and themes which were developed on the covers of the exercise books in more than fifty years of activity of the Pigna company⁴⁹, from the end of the nineteenth century to the post Sec-

⁴⁹ The documentary materials which are reproduced here (sketches, illustrations, samples of covers, etc.) and related to the chronological period from the last decade of the nineteenth centu-

ond World War period, allows us to globally evaluate the developmental trends and the aforementioned aspects, as well as to see the various facets which the Alzano Lombardo company had, in the framework of the mass-schooling and nationalization processes which occurred after the unification of Italy. In connection with the historical phases, the large collection of materials (sketches, samples of covers, single copies, etc.) which are preserved in the Historical Archives of the Pigna paper mill, permits us to outline four different periods, each one presenting homogeneous characteristics from the point of view of the style, of the typographic-editorial format and, what is more significant for our analysis, of the contents and messages that were transmitted.

As regards the first phase, that is between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, from the analysis of the covers a strong attention principally emerges – according to typical nineteenth-century models – towards themes of moral and civic education (one recalls in particular the series: “Good children” and “Bad children”)⁵⁰; in the meantime it is also clear that there was an intention of offering, through exercise books, an occasion for enriching the grounds of school knowledge, thanks to a sort of “additional curriculum” supplementing the primary school course. Hence, the first and still disorganized “series” were launched dedicated to the alphabet and writing, as well as disciplines such as geography, the history of the country, drawing and painting, arithmetic and geometry, natural sciences etc.⁵¹. In addition to the aforementioned typologies, we must add the ones destined to illustrate fairy-tales⁵², moral stories⁵³ and episodes from the great works of Italian and European literature⁵⁴.

ry up to the second post-war period (1950s and 1960s), are stored at the Historical Archives of the Pigna paper mill (from now on cited as: ASCP) in Alzano Lombardo (Bergamo). I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Direction of the firm *Cartiere Paolo Pigna* for allowing me to access the Historical Archive and to consult the rich documentation that is kept there, as well as for allowing me to reproduce – in this paper – a significant part of the Pigna exercise books’ covers between the nineteenth and twentieth century. I would like to sincerely thank Giulia Bassi and Valerio Volpi for giving me their precious collaboration in order to find the documentation and reproduce it. It must be clarified that the Pigna Historical Archive has not yet been fully arranged, therefore a first and tentative arrangement of the documentation, together with a first organization into series, and the archival references, have been given by the Author, in collaboration with Giulia Bassi.

⁵⁰ See the illustrations kept inside the series: without title, *senza titolo* (from now on: s.t.), 1908, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, n. 2.

⁵¹ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Alfabeto*, without date (*senza data*, from now on: s.d.), in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, nn. 1-2.

⁵² See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Favole*, s.d., in ASCP, *ibid.*

⁵³ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Favole*, s.d., in ASCP, *Scatola bianca grande*.

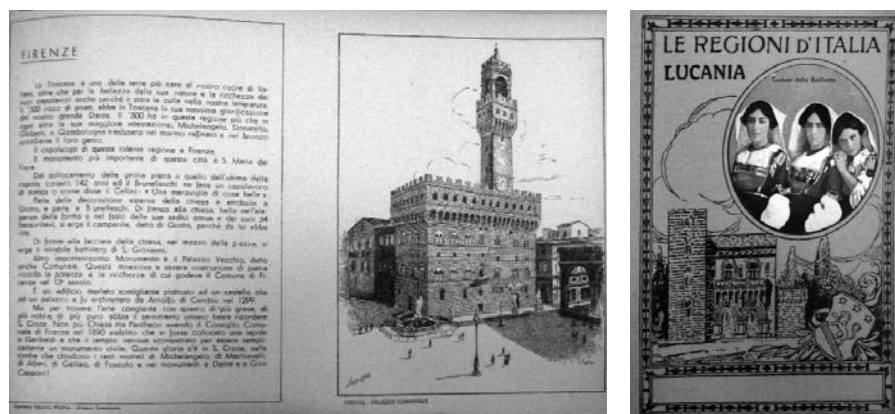
⁵⁴ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Don Chisciotte della Mancia*, s.d., in ASCP, *ibid.*



Series *Alfabeto* («Alphabet»).

The second phase is noted starting above all with the *Libyan feat* and the First World War. Here subjects and themes linked to the national identity and patriotism prevail, as do the cult of the nation and the knowledge of its beauty. Significant, as well as illustrative of a totally new approach even from the point of view of the language and the iconographic communication styles, are the “series” of covers, which were devoted to:

– the great cities of Italy⁵⁵ and the Italian regions with their customs and traditions⁵⁶;



Series *Le regioni d'Italia* («The regions of Italy»).

⁵⁵ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Città d'Italia*, s.d., in ASCP, Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni, nn. 1-2 and Scatola bianca grande.

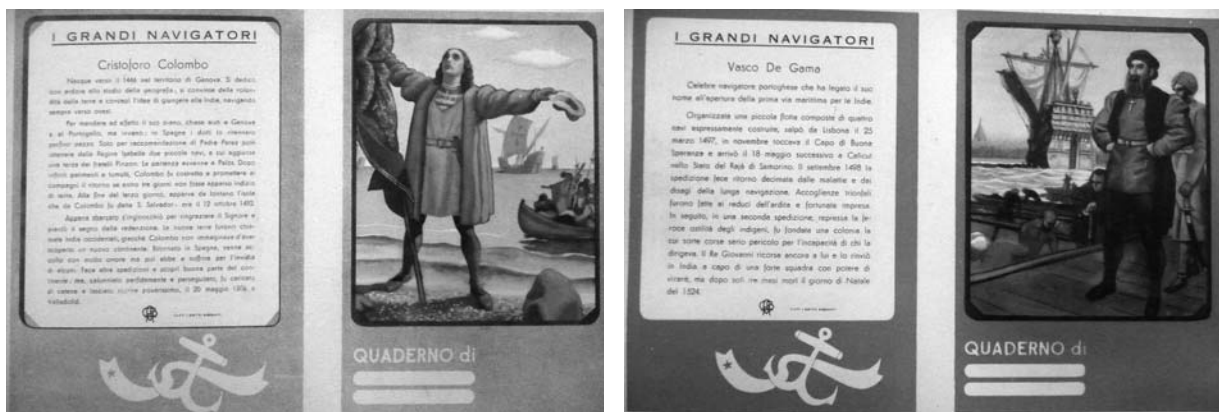
⁵⁶ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Le Regioni d'Italia*, 1921-1927, in ASCP, Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni, n. 2.

– the Italian colonies⁵⁷;



Series *Le Colonie d'Italia* («The Italian colonies»).

– great Italians in history (an idealistic representation of the “people of saints, poets and explorers”)⁵⁸;

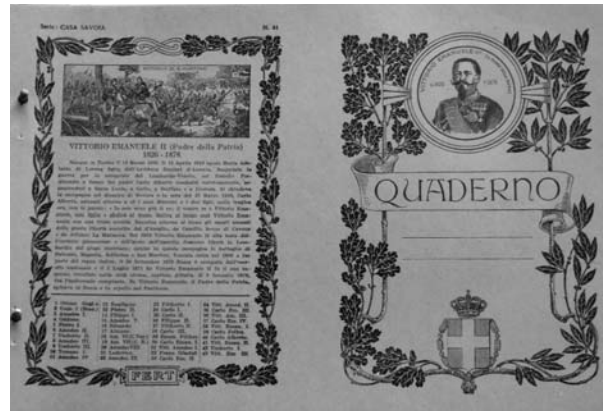
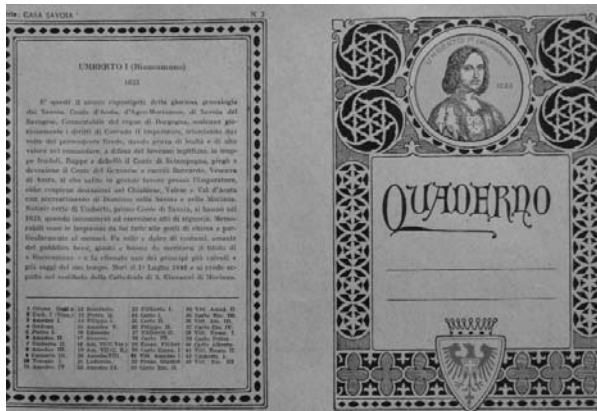


Series *I grandi navigatori* («Great Italian explorers»).

⁵⁷ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Le Colonie d'Italia*, 1910-1912 e 1921-1927, in ASCP, *ibid*.

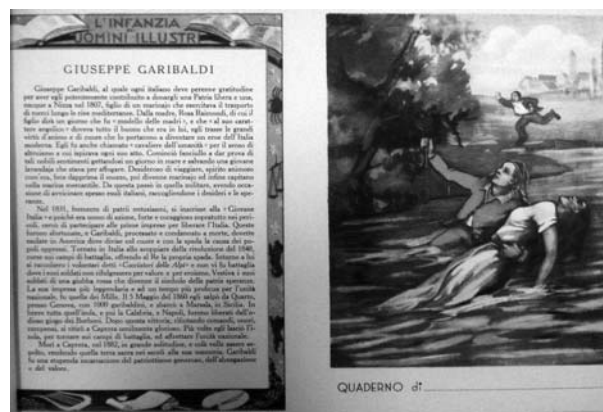
⁵⁸ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *I grandi navigatori*, s.d., in ASCP, Scatola bianca grande.

– the glorification of Italian roots and the historical role of the Savoy Dynasty⁵⁹;



Series *Casa Savoia* («The Savoy Dynasty»).

– the *pantheon* of the “Fathers of the Nation”⁶⁰;

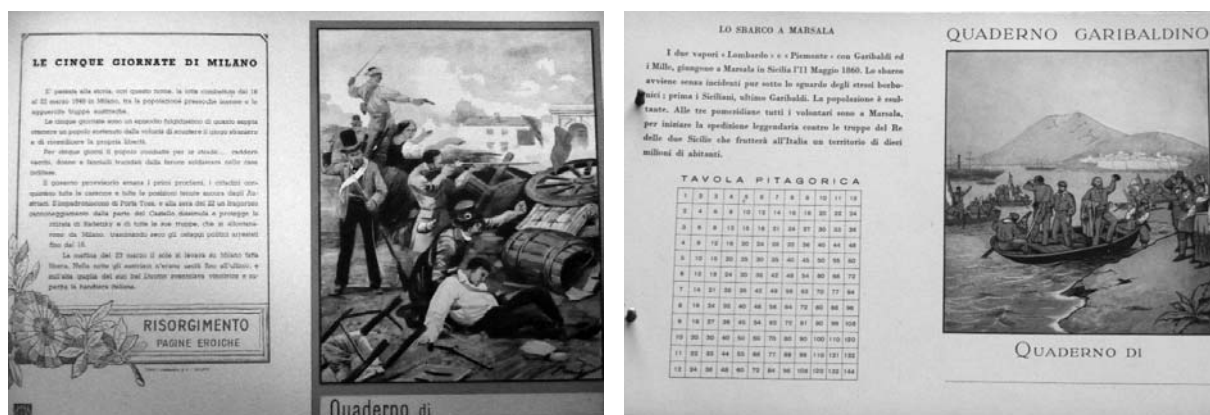


Series *L'infanzia di uomini illustri* («Childhood of Great Men»).

⁵⁹ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Casa Savoia*, 1909-1910 and 1925-1926, in ASCP, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *L'infanzia di uomini illustri*, 1922-1924 and 1936-1937, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, nn. 1-2.

– the leading figures of the *Risorgimento*, considered from a popular national point of view⁶¹;



Series *Risorgimento. Pagine eroiche* («Risorgimento: heroic pages») and *Quaderno garibaldino* («Garibaldin exercise book»).

– colonial feats⁶²;



Series *Le grandi imprese coloniali* («Great colonial feats») and *Le nostre colonie* («Our colonies»).

⁶¹ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Risorgimento. Pagine eroiche* and *Quaderno garibaldino*, s.d., in ASCP, Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni, n. 2 and Scatola bianca grande.

⁶² See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Le grandi imprese coloniali* and *Le nostre colonie*, 1910-1913, in ASCP, Scatola bianca grande.

– the heroic evidence of the Great War⁶³.



Series *Episodi del valore italiano nella Grande Guerra* («Events of Italian bravery in the Great War 1915-1918») and *Gli invitti di Redipuglia* («The unbeaten patriots of Redipuglia»).

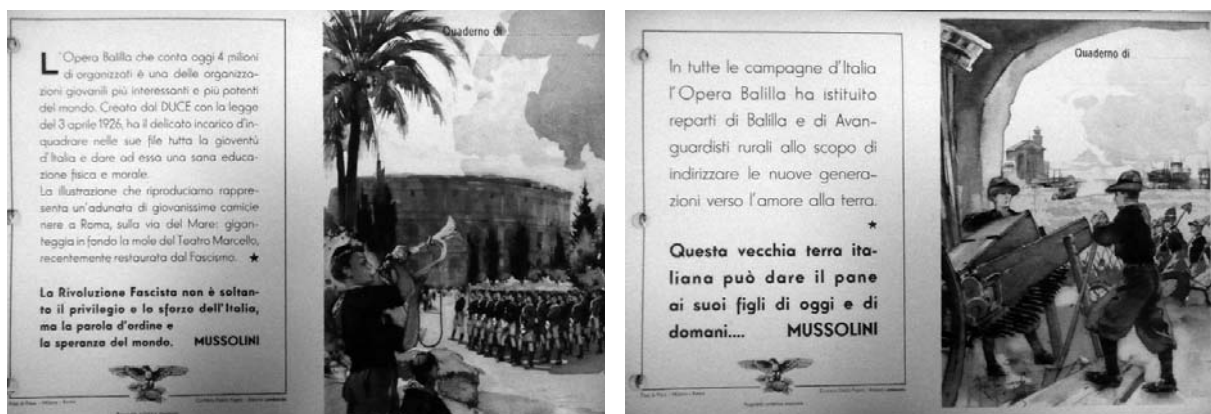
The third and more prolific period of the production of the Pigna exercise books coincides with the twenty year Fascist period. From the second half of the 1920s, a notable increase in sales and the organization of a commercial distribution network capable of supplying stationery stores all over the national territory was accompanied by a business policy aimed at achieving the objectives of the Mussolini regime in the field of school and, in general, of the mass education of the youth. All this was to be clearly reflected in the choice of subjects and themes to be developed on the covers. In fact we can notice the realisation of a complete strategy, aimed at supporting and giving impulse to the

⁶³ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Il valore italiano nella Grande Guerra*, *Episodi del valore italiano nella Grande Guerra 1915-1918*, *I Condottieri* and *Gli Invitti a Redipuglia*, 1921-1923 and 1927-1931, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, n. 1 and *Scatola bianca grande*.

process of fascistization of schools and the youth⁶⁴, according to the modalities and features which were similar to those developed in the reading books for the primary school, especially in the *Single State Textbooks*⁶⁵.

The analysis of the “series” of covers which circulated in this phase, not only discloses the systematic and pervasive nature of the intention of transforming school exercise books into a formidable tool for the transmission and spread of fascist ideology and propaganda; but it also reveals the extraordinary modernity of techniques and graphic-verbal languages used, which marked a real turning point in comparison with the previous phases. A rapid review of the series of exercise books of the 1920s and 1930s, up to the Second World War – a period where production came to a drastic standstill⁶⁶ – shows an increasingly prevalence of themes and subjects with a strong ideological and political mark, which became almost exclusive during the 1930s, for example:

– the exaltation of the “fascist revolution” and the appeal to the fundamental principles and the *slogans* of the regime⁶⁷;



Series *Nuove legioni* («New legions»).

⁶⁴ See A. Gibelli, *Il regime illustrato e il popolo bambino*, in V. De Grazia, S. Luzzatto, *Dizionario del fascismo*, Vol. I, Torino, Einaudi, 2002, pp. 262-263; Id., *Il popolo bambino. Infanzia e nazione dalla Grande Guerra a Salò*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005. Regarding the specific topic of the school exercise books, see also D. Montino, *Le parole educate. Libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, Milano, Selene, 2005.

⁶⁵ See M. Bacigalupi, P. Fossati, *Da plebe a popolo. L'educazione popolare nei libri di scuola dall'Unità d'Italia alla Repubblica*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1986; A. Ascenzi, R. Sani (eds.), *Il libro per la scuola tra idealismo e fascismo. L'opera della Commissione centrale per l'esame dei libri di testo da Giuseppe Lombardo Radice ad Alessandro Melchiori (1923-1928)*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 2005; D. Montino, *Le parole educate. Libri e quaderni tra fascismo e Repubblica*, pp. 121-144; R. Sani, *La «bonifica fascista» dei libri di testo dalla riforma Gentile alla Carta della Scuola di Bottai*, paper presented at the conference promoted by the Faculty of Education of the University of L'Aquila (L'Aquila, 30-31 March 2007), whose proceedings are in the press.

⁶⁶ See an outline in G. Bertacchi (ed.), *La Resistenza ad Alzano Lombardo. Itinerari di ricerca attraverso testi e documenti cinquant'anni dopo*, Bergamo, Istituto bergamasco per la storia della Resistenza e dell'età contemporanea, 1995, pp. 23-28 and *passim*.

⁶⁷ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Nuove Legioni*, s.d., in ASCP, Scatola bianca grande.

– the subtle propaganda against communism, or rather the “Nation’s enemy” explained to children⁶⁸;



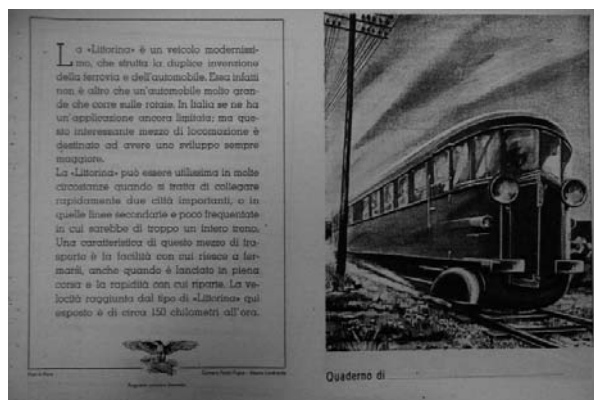
Series *Infanzia felice* («Happy Childhood»).

– the “new fascist Italy” represented in the great works of the regime (monuments, town planning, technical conquests, etc.)⁶⁹;



Series *Ali d'Italia* («Italian Wings») and *Visioni d'Italia* («Italian visions»).

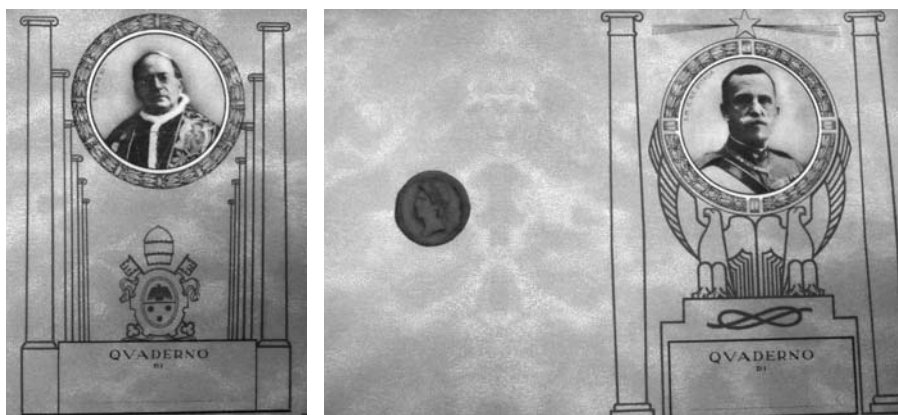
Series *I nostri transatlantici* («Our transatlantics») and *Grandi Record* («Great records»).



⁶⁸ See the illustrations kept inside the series: *Infanzia felice*, 1935, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, n. 1.

⁶⁹ See the illustrations in the series: *Visioni d'Italia*, *Opere del Regime*, *Grandi Record*, *Ali d'Italia* and *I nostri Transatlantici*, 1930-1936, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, nn. 1-2, *Campionario copertine 1932-1950* and *Scatola bianca grande*.

– the celebration of the Conciliation and the new relationship between the State and Church after the Lateran Pact of 1929⁷⁰;



Series *Pergamena* («Parchement»).

– the transformation of the country into a great military power and the building of an “Armed Nation”⁷¹;



Series *Nuove armi* («New weapons»).

⁷⁰ See the illustrations in the series: *Pergamena*, s.d., in ASCP, Scatola bianca grande.

⁷¹ See the illustrations kept in the series: *Nuove Armi*, *Navi da Guerra*, *Civiltà-Vittorie-Armi*, 1931-1938 and 1940-1943, in ASCP, Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni, n. 1, Campionario copertine 1932-1950 and Scatola bianca grande.

– the effort of integrating people in the colonies and the founding of the Empire⁷²;

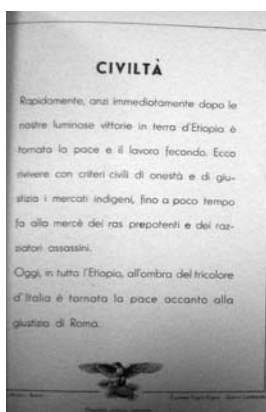


Series *Colonie d'Italia* («Italian colonies»).

Series *L'Italia nelle colonie* («Colonial Italy») and *Vittorie* («Victories»).



– the dimensions and characters of the “Fascist culture”, and its expansion into the Empire’s territories⁷³;



Series *Civiltà* («Civilisation») and *Infanzia felice* («Happy Childhood»).

⁷² See the illustrations in the series: *Colonie d'Italia*, *Africa Orientale* and *Civiltà-Vittorie-Armi*, 1930-1943, in ASCP, *ibid*.

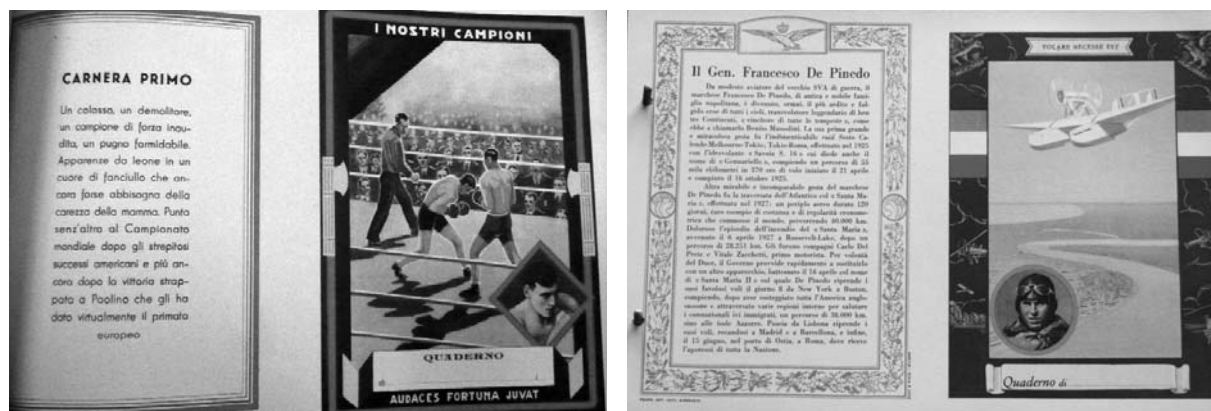
⁷³ See the series: *Infanzia felice* and *Civiltà-Vittorie-Armi*, 1935 and 1940-1943, in ASCP, *ibid*.

– Autarchy, the “grain battle” and the new “work culture”⁷⁴;



Series *Autarchia* («Autarchy») and *Agricoltura* («Agriculture»).

– daily life in the twenty year Fascist period, told through the actions of “Great Italians” in the field of sport and in aeronautical feats⁷⁵;



Series *I nostri campioni* («Our champions») and *Ali d'Italia* («Ali d'Italia»).

⁷⁴ Series: *Autarchia* and *Agricoltura*, 1936-1938 and 1932, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, n. 2, *Campionario copertine 1932-1950* and *Scatola bianca grande*.

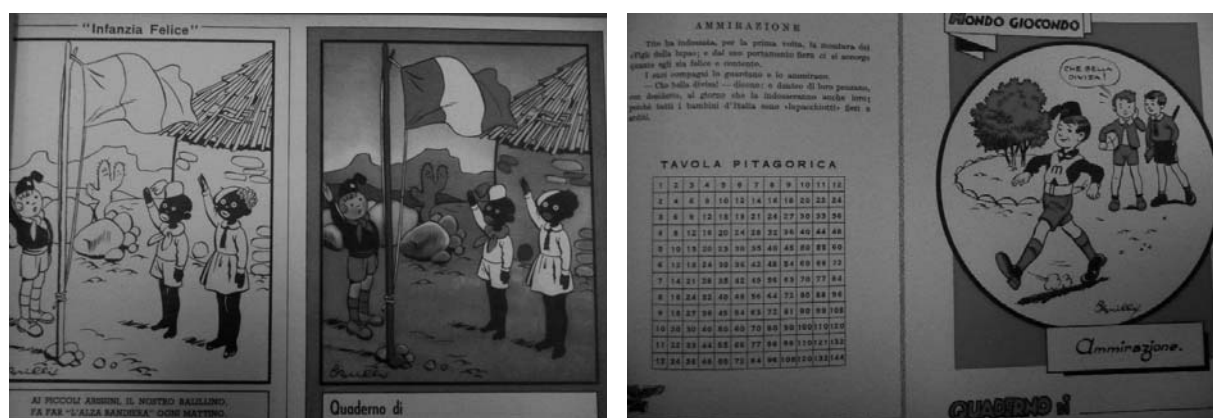
⁷⁵ Series: *I nostri campioni*, *Sport* and *Ali d'Italia*, 1929-1936, in ASCP, *ibid*.

– the exaltation of physical and military education for youth⁷⁶;



Series *Giovinezza sportiva* («Sporting youth») and *Giovinezza in marcia* («Marching youth»).

– the building of the fascist *New Man*, exemplified through three diverse genres of illustrations and texts: focusing on the image of the healthy and care-free childhood (the “happy childhood”)⁷⁷;

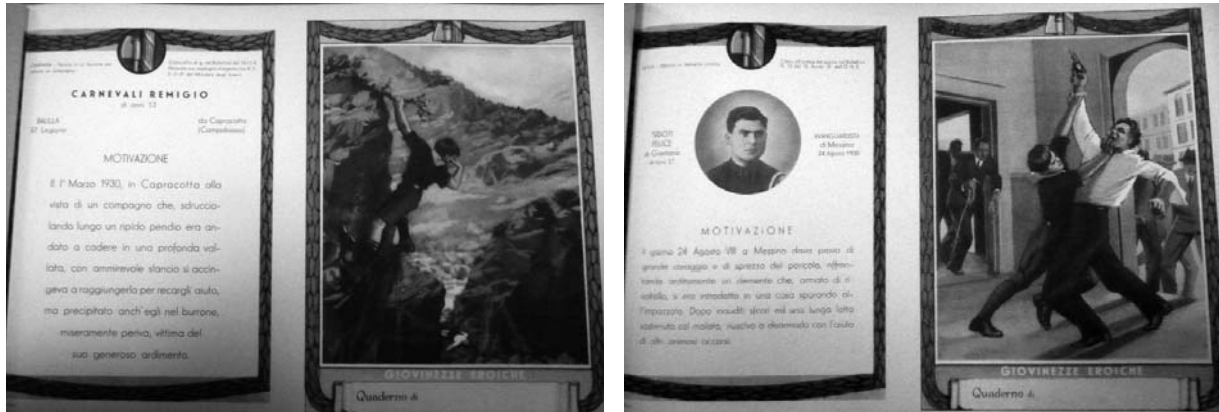


Series *Infanzia felice* («Happy childhood») and *Mondo Giocondo* («Plaulful world»).

⁷⁶ Series: *Giovinezza sportiva* and *Giovinezza in marcia*, s.d. and 1936-1940, in ASCP, *ibid*.

⁷⁷ Series: *Infanzia felice* and *Mondo giocondo*, 1935 and s.d., in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, n. 1-2.

– the example of the “heroic youth”⁷⁸;



Series *Giovinezze eroiche* («Heroic youth»).

– the militarisation of the new generation, which was inspired by the famous motto: “Each boy a soldier!”⁷⁹;

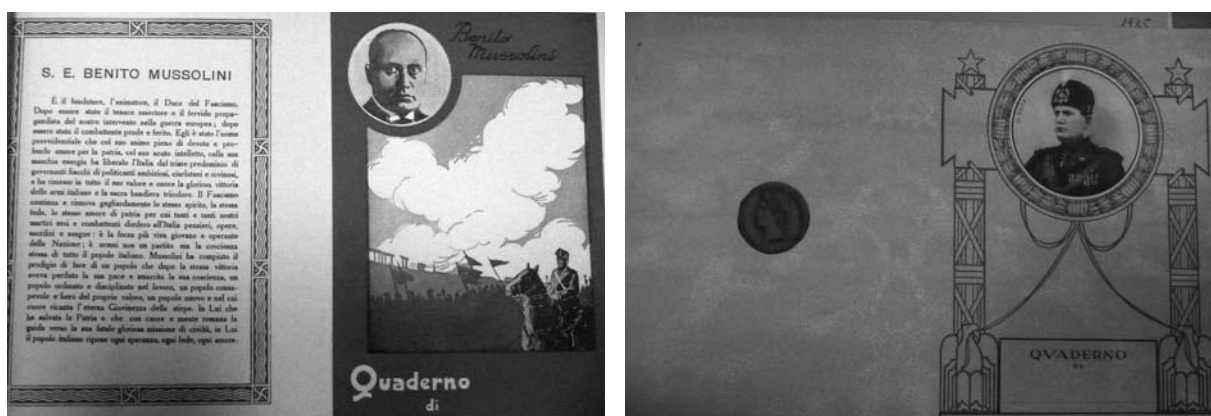


Series *Piccolo soldato* («Little soldier»).

⁷⁸ Series: *Giovinezze eroiche*, 1937, in ASCP, Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni, n. 2.

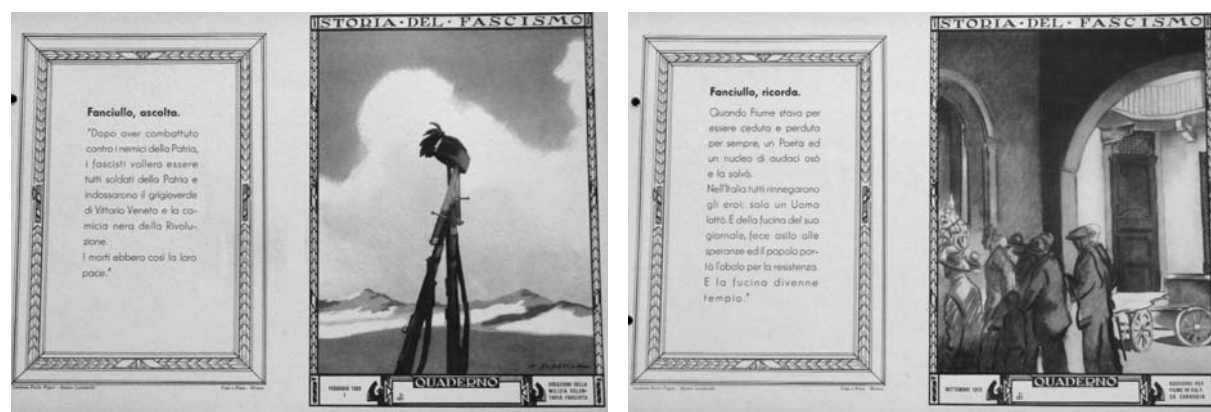
⁷⁹ Series: *Piccolo soldato*, s.d., in ASCP, Scatola bianca grande.

– and finally, one can not forget the real “cult of the *Duce*” (i.e. Mussolini), who was often retracted on the exercise books’ covers⁸⁰ in various styles and situations.



Series *Benito Mussolini* and *Pergamena* («Parchement»).

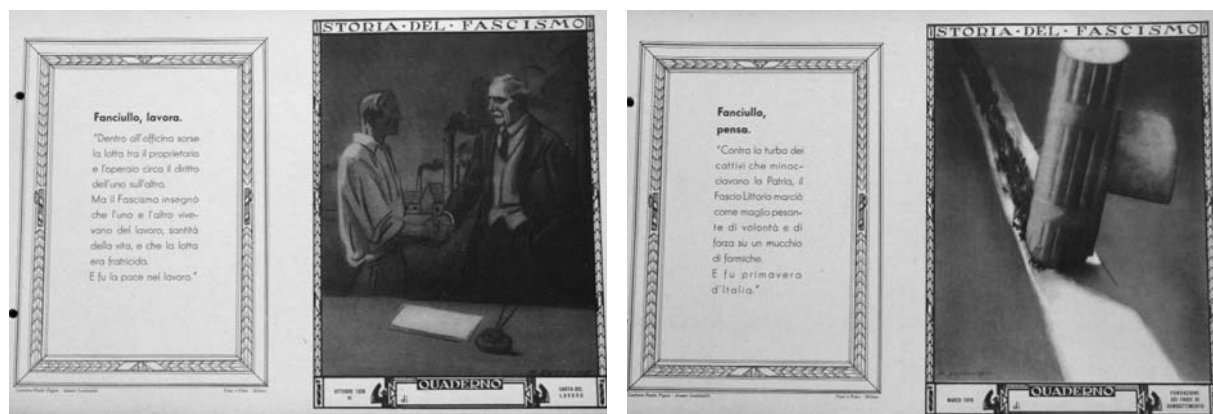
The choice of matching images (drawings, photographs, etc.) with brief explanatory texts, which clarified or completed the picture’s message, was subject to a particular impulse in this phase. As in previous periods, the texts were written in a clear and essential language, and easy to comprehend at all levels; however, as if in confirmation of the Pigna company’s capability to adapt its communicative approach to diverse contexts and in tune with the “new times”, during the twenty year Fascist period, they acquired the argumentative style and the rhetorical ways of the political mass-communication adopted by the fascist regime. In contrast, they consequently lost their directness and intentional simplicity which had in the past guaranteed the exercise books’ efficacy and success with the particular public of children, boys and their families. As proof of this we must recall the cycle of covers from the series *Storia del Fascismo* («History of Fascism»), illustrated by Marcello Dudovich in the 1930s⁸¹.



Series *Storia del Fascismo* («History of Fascism»).

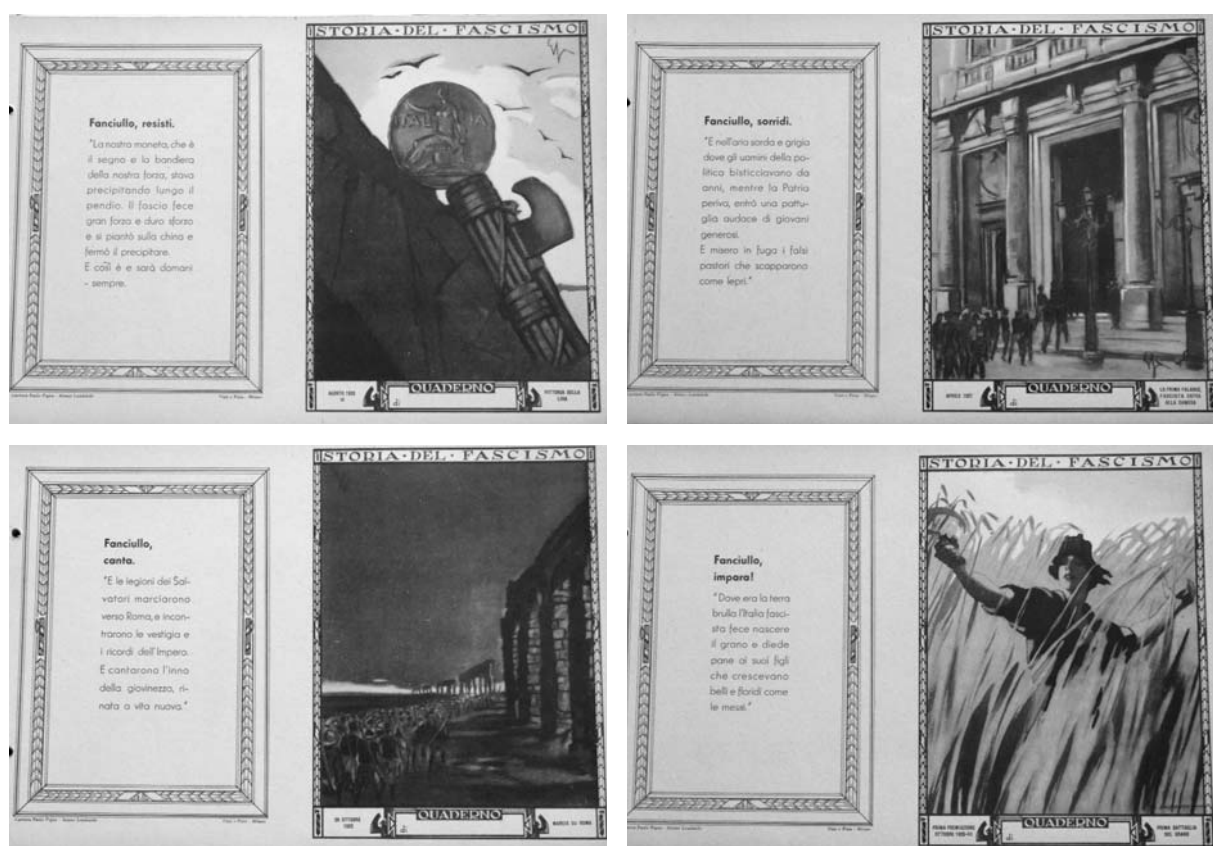
⁸⁰ Series: *I condottieri*, 1931, in ASCP, Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni, n. 1.

⁸¹ Series: *Storia del Fascismo*, s.d., in ASCP, Scatola bianca grande.



Series *Storia del Fascismo* («History of Fascism»).

These covers, because of the particular style of their images and texts, constitute something more than a reconstruction or a telling of facts and events (the “history” of Fascism, as suggested by the title). Rather, they take the shape of a real “fascist catechesis”, typically set according to the rhetorical forms and the communicative style of religious works.



Series *Storia del Fascismo* («History of Fascism»).

From this point of view, it is undeniable that we find ourselves in front of one of the most significant and emblematic examples of the union between word and image, text and picture. A union which reintroduced into school exercise books the concept of Fascism as a “political religion” – which was already largely witnessed in manuals and textbooks (e.g. in some history manuals⁸²) – in which determined symbolic and cultural tools and the verbal-iconic language revisited, from a secular point of view, the expressive forms typical of religious speech⁸³.



Series *Storia del Fascismo* («History of Fascism»).

⁸² See S. Guarracino, *I manuali del consenso*, «I viaggi di Erodoto» 1989, 8, pp. 170-183; A. Ascenzi, *L'immagine di Giuseppe Mazzini nei manuali di storia dall'Unità al fascismo*, in *Giuseppe Mazzini. Verifiche e incontri*, Genova, Gammarò Editori, 2006, pp. 17-37; and Ead., *L'insegnamento della storia e la manualistica storica da Gentile a Bottai*, in *Educazione e scuola in Italia da Gentile a Bottai (1922-1943)*, paper presented at the conference promoted by the Faculty of Education of the University of L'Aquila (L'Aquila, 30th-31st March 2007), whose proceedings are currently being printed.

⁸³ See E. Gentile, *Il culto del Littorio. La sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1993

With fall of Fascism after the Second World War and the coming of a democratic government, the Pigna paper mill had to face the need to reorganize production activity, and to cope with the damaged material and the general crisis in the sector caused by the lack of raw materials and by the delays in restoring the commercial network of distribution. In addition to this, the firm had to radically rethink all its editorial strategies, and to redefine, from the point of view of its cover themes and subjects, its own business image.

It was a necessarily long and complex process, which was characterised by highs and lows and many difficulties, but which allowed the firm not only to keep its production in the sector, but also to develop and to enlarge its own field of action, through acquiring a further share of the market⁸⁴. Obviously it is not possible in these circumstances to explain the development of the Alzano Lombardo company in the last fifty years, but in conclusion it is worthy mentioning two substantial aspects of the “new strategy” which was undertaken by Pigna in the post Second World War period. The first aspect regards the definitive overcoming of that particular *pedagogical intentionality* – in the sense of projects aimed at national mass-education, which were time after time assumed and followed by the post-unification ruling classes – which, from the Liberal age to the Fascist period, had represented a constant in the production and editorial strategies of the paper mill, and contributed to define its identity and undoubtedly to achieve its success.

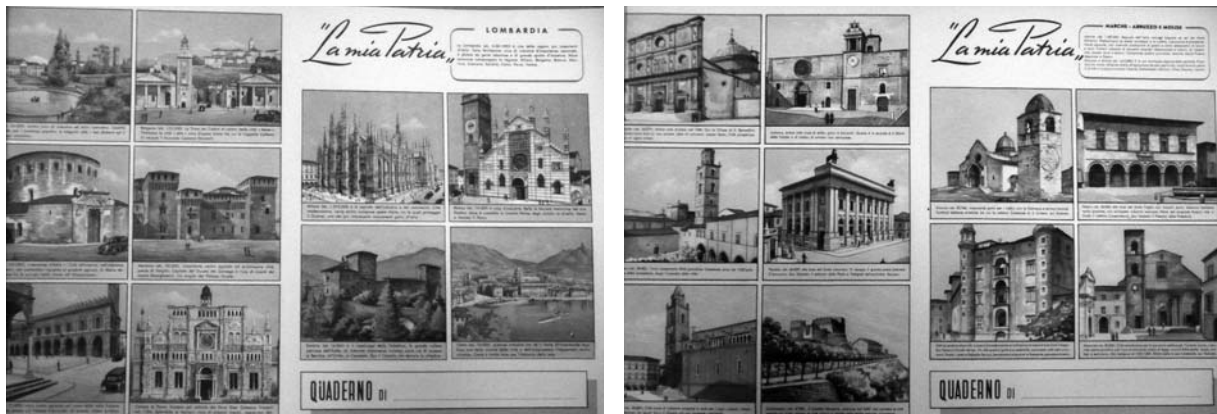
The second aspect, strictly linked to the first one, deals with the fact that during the post Second World War period the definitive decline of the traditional perspective of supporting the process of mass-nationalization of the Italian youth, did not coincide with undertaking an analogous perspective of engagement in embedding the new values and ethical-civic demands of the rising Italian democracy in the new generations⁸⁵.

As regards the cover themes, the choice focused – at least initially – on rigorously neutral subjects, as testified by the widespread series of exercise books whose covers were dedicated to “My country: monuments and landscapes of the peninsula”⁸⁶.

⁸⁴ See M. De Meis, A. Pellegrini, *Il settore della cellulosa e della carta*, in Camera dei Deputati, *Atti della Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sui limiti posti alla concorrenza nel campo economico*, vol. VII: *Studi e monografie*, Roma, 1965, pp. 129-145.

⁸⁵ See R. Sani, *La scuola e l'educazione alla democrazia negli anni del secondo dopoguerra*, in M. Corsi, R. Sani (ed.), *L'educazione alla democrazia tra passato e presente*, Filano, Vita & Pensiero, 2004, pp. 43-62.

⁸⁶ See illustrations kept in the series: *La mia Patria e Italia artistica*, 1953-1954 and 1955, in ASCP, *Campionario vecchi quaderni*, nn. 1-2 and *Scatola bianca grande*.



Series *La mia patria* («My homeland»).

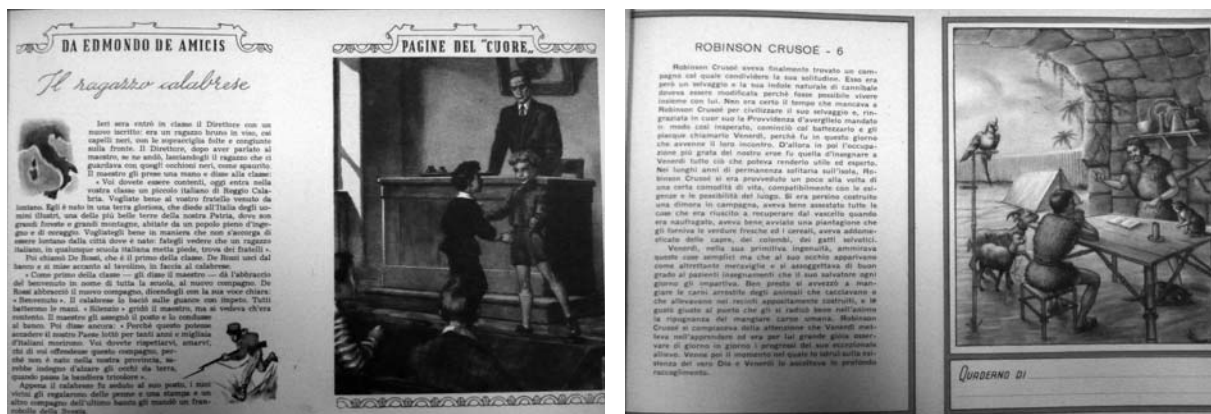
From the 1950s, apart from welcoming the ever spreading “American dream” with its stories about the Far West⁸⁷,



Series *Eroi del Far West* («Heroes of the Far West») and *Avventure indiane* («Indian Adventures»).

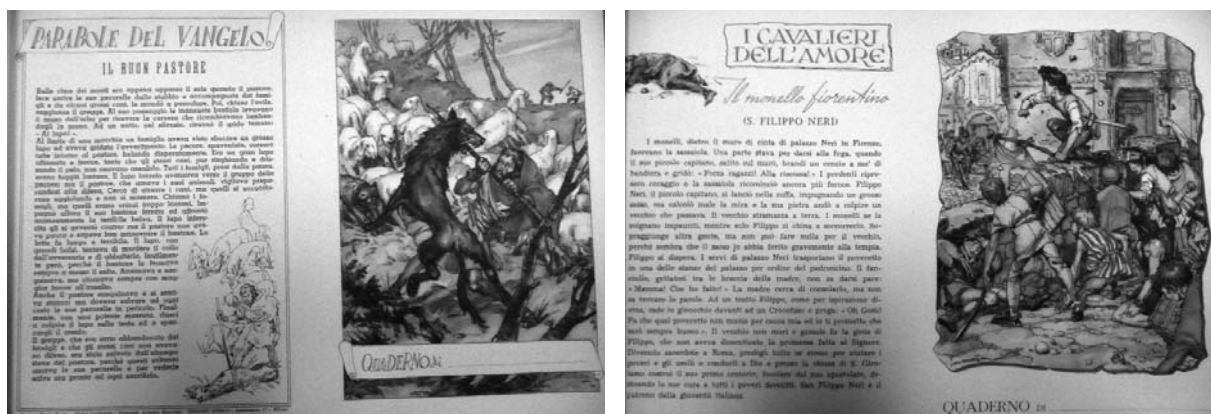
⁸⁷ See illustrations kept in the series: *Eroi del Far West e Avventure indiane*, 1948, in ASCP, *ibid.*

and recovering reassuring pages from the classics of children's and youth literature (*Cuore* by De Amicis, several tales by Emilio Salgari, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe and *Peter Pan* by James Matthew Barrie)⁸⁸,



Series *Pagine del "Cuore"* («Pages of "Cuore"») and *Robinson Crusoe*.

the Pigna exercise books gave generous room to the use of religious themes⁸⁹;



Series *Parabole del Vangelo* («Parables of the New Testament») and *I cavalieri dell'amore* («The knights of love»).

⁸⁸ See illustrations in the series: *Pagine del «Cuore»*, *Sandokan*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Peter Pan*, 1950-1954, in ASCP, *ibid.*, n. 1.

⁸⁹ See illustrations kept in the series: *Parabole del Vangelo* e *I Cavalieri dell'Amore*, 1948-1949, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, nn. 1-2.

and to entertainment and amusement purposes, which were for the very first time consciously and purposely organized into age brackets, focusing especially on fairy-tales for the youngest and on comics for pupils in intermediate classes⁹⁰;



Series *La rosa di Bagdad* («Baghdad Rose») and *Giornalino*.

and on the presentation of new sport “idols”, for the somewhat more grown up pupils⁹¹.



Series *I grandi campioni del ciclismo* («The champions of cycling»).

⁹⁰ See illustrations kept in the series: *Le Mille e una Notte-I viaggi di Sind Bad*, *La Rosa di Bagdad*, *Bill-Boll-Bull* and *Giornalino*, 1948-1950, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, n. 1-2 and *Scatola bianca grande*.

⁹¹ See illustrations kept in the series: *I grandi campioni del ciclismo*, 1948-1949, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine vecchi quaderni*, nn. 1-2.

A certain success was obtained by the covers dedicated to “nature and its marvels”⁹², taken from popular American scientific documentaries, aimed at stimulating the imagination of the adolescent and enlarging their knowledge.



Series *La natura e le sue meraviglie* («Wonders of the nature»).

Substantially, in a framework which was marked by a gradual prevailing of market logic and of the dynamics connected with the development of the consumer society⁹³, the new editorial strategy adopted by the Pigna paper mill emerged – in the same way as would happen to other important enterprises in this sector – becoming one which had to comply with the new tastes of the young and public opinion, which were then being shaped by the cinema and other mass media, and increasingly inspired by American models (Walt Disney) and by the *American Way of Life*⁹⁴.

After the definitive fading of any pretension to contribute to the building of the “new Italy” and to the nationalization of the young generations, the Pigna exercise books have given back to us, in these last fifty years, the image

⁹² See illustrations kept in the series: *La natura e le sue meraviglie*-Walt Disney, 1950-1960, in ASCP, *Campionario copertine* 1932-1950.

⁹³ See C. D’Apice, *L’arcipelago dei consumi. Consumi e redditi delle famiglie italiane dal dopoguerra a oggi*, Bari, De Donato, 1981; and G. Ragone, *Consumi e stile di vita in Italia*, Napoli, Guida, 1985. About the transformations in Italians’ daily life during the first fifteen years after the war, see also, G. Venè, *Vola colomba. Vita quotidiana degli italiani negli anni del dopoguerra: 1945-1960*, Milano, Mondadori, 1990.

⁹⁴ In this connection see V. De Grazia, *La sfida dello «star system»: l’americanismo nella formazione della cultura di massa in Europa 1920-1965*, in D. Ellwood, A. Lyttleton (eds.), «Quaderni Storici», 1985, pp. 95-134; S. Gundle, *L’americanizzazione del quotidiano. Televisione e consumismo nell’Italia degli anni Cinquanta*, «Quaderni Storici», 1986, 62, pp. 563-580; G. Finck, F. Minganti, *La vita privata italiana sul modello americano*, in Ph. Ariès, G. Duby (eds.), *La vita privata. V: Il Novecento*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1988, pp. 351-380.

of a childhood and youth which are no longer regimented or object of an ideological and political plan, but which exist in a rather individual and private dimension, product of a process which has passed through various and deep transformations, from the immediate post-war period up to present day.

Anna Ascenzi

Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Educazione e della Formazione

Università degli Studi di Macerata (Italy)

ascenzi@unimc.it